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## THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

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## NORWAY

## A READING LESSON

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Far to the north, stretching out toward the eternal snow and ice of Arctic regions, and in the latitudes of Greenland and Alaska, lies my native country, Norway.

Every year great numbers of foreigners visit this northern country in order to enjoy its beautiful scenery. And no wonder, for nature presents herself in Norway in a marvelous variety of forms.

To see Norway with its islands, fiords, glaciers, waterfalls, mountains, lakes, and forests; to see it all in the glow of a northern summer night, or under the flaming northern lights of its long winter, is to acquire a beautiful remembrance for one's whole life.

But there is something to be found in Norway besides its scenery, although this is all for which the country stands to the superficial traveler. The beauty of Norway lies, after all, in its people: they are the blossom of the country, and its beating heart; and in their character, in their mythology, literature, and art, the wonderful scenery is reflected as in a mirror. The people are the living and ever-changing expression of all that is beautiful and upright, as well as of all that is gloomy and melancholy, in this scenery, which has left its deep impress, not only upon the life of the individual, but also upon the whole national life of Norway.

Are you able to change your identity for a few moments in order to live with these people, to love and hate as they do, to enter into their longings and sufferings, into their hopes and yearnings? If you are, we are ready for our journey.

Let us imagine ourselves approaching the Norwegian coast in a steamer. Can you see the little white spot appearing on the horizon? As it comes nearer it proves to be a sailboat. A Norwegian pilot-boat has come to meet us and bring the first greetings from the country that we are to visit.

The weather is bright, but the sea is running high. At one moment the little sailboat seems almost hidden among the big waves; at another, it is high on the crest of them. The pilot-boat comes nearer and nearer, although continually dashed over by the rough sea. Soon you can distinguish the Norwegian red, white, and blue on the top mast, and discern two persons on the boat. At last the pilot is close enough to throw the line over to us on the steamer, and the next minute he is on board and takes command of the vessel.

The Norwegian pilot is the modern type of the old Norse viking. You find the same daring, the same undaunted spirit, in the two; for both belong to that stalwart stamp of man that among the old Norsemen was considered the ideal type of manhood. The pilot is one of the most interesting figures among the Norwegian people and embodies some of their best qualities. His home is found on one of the barren islands along the coast, where he is always watching for vessels in danger. The most furious storm never finds him unwilling to start out in his little boat and risk his life when other lives can be saved. When the pilot is on board and has taken command of the vessel, the pilot-boat is left entirely in the hands of the little pilot-boy, a lad of perhaps thirteen or fourteen years. He has to take the boat home all alone, but he knows every reef around; from the time he could lift an oar he has followed his father on his excursions. The boat was his cradle and only plaything; the boat is, perhaps, the last thing he sees in the world.

This is the way many a Norwegian lad is brought up, with his boat as his school-desk, and the sea as his schoolmaster. As the

sea is, so is his life: it embraces his whole future with its joys and sorrows; he looks to the sea for every blessing that life can bestow on him, but also for every misfortune that can befall a human being.

But let us watch for land. We see a blue line on the horizon. Whether it be land or only clouds is hard to tell, and for hours we watch this blue line with the feeling that behind it is hidden something wonderful. As we come nearer, this blue line proves to be the continuous chain of islands that are scattered all along the Norwegian coast, protecting the mainland from the rough outside sea and forming a safeguard for navigation. You don't feel quite at ease as the steamer makes its way in among these rocky, barren islands and reefs. They seem to look at you with an evil eye, and you wonder how you can get safely through. But there is no occasion for fear. Look at the pilot with his firm grasp of the wheel. His weather-beaten face is perfectly calm; his whole life has been spent among these reefs and islands, and what seem enemies to you are old acquaintances of his.

Back of this fence of islands the mainland rises, weather-beaten, dark, like a huge giant. You do not expect to find human dwellings in this desert of sea and rock. The seabirds seem to be the only inhabitants here. However, once in awhile, as if emerging from the deep sea, and still wet from its embrace, a little village appears on the naked shore. You get only a glimpse of a few houses scattered about; some stores for fish down on the shore; some vessels in the little harbor—that is all. A moment later the little town is hidden behind the next promontory.

All along the coast numerous narrow entrances leading into the interior of the mountain mass are found. These narrow inlets of the sea are called "fiords," and constitute the most characteristic feature of Norway.

Let us enter one of these fiords. Islands and cliffs close the entrance behind us, and we see nothing more of the open sea. You are shut in by the almost perpendicular walls of the fiord, and it seems as if a door were closed between you and the rest of the world. The whole scene produces an entirely novel sen-

sation, because you have had nothing in your previous experience with which to compare it. You look with awe at the rugged, savage mountains as they rise perpendicularly to a sheer height of five or six thousand feet, threatening you with avalanches of snow and rock.

The fiord is here very narrow and has a depth of, perhaps, more than five thousand feet. The few huts to be found cling to the mountain-sides like eagles' nests, and goats climb the mountains to seek their scant food.

Looking up, you may see a green spot thousands of feet above your head. By looking more closely you make it out to be cultivated fields, with some houses in between. You wonder how people and cattle ever can get up to these fields that seem to be hanging out over your head thousands of feet above. A narrow path leads up there, and whatever is needed in the house must be carried on horseback. Along the precipices, across the thundering torrents, the strong little horse has to be led. It happens often during winter that snow and ice block up the narrow passage; then the family will be for months separated from the rest of the world. During the long, dark winter they will see no human being except members of their own family. If during this time death should visit them, the corpse would have to be kept throughout the winter, to be carried the next spring on horseback to the far-distant church. Sometimes not even a path leads up to these green patches. I know instances where from a projecting ledge of a rock a rope has been tied; down this rope the peasant has to climb to cut some grass.

The waters of the fiord have a bluish-green color, and are almost fresh owing to the constant downpour from the glaciers and snow-fields. All is quiet and gloomy here, and a constant twilight prevails under the shadow of these mountains. Once in a while the silence is broken by the thundering of avalanches, which sweep down from the mountains and for a moment disturb the quiet waters of the fiord; or by the distant murmur of the cascades as they are precipitated in unbroken falls of more than two thousand feet. The surface of the water is perfectly smooth and shining like a mirror. If you look down into this abyss,

you will have a feeling as if you were suspended in the midst of the vast blue space, hovering between two infinites. Fortunately, not much time is left for us to look at this gloomy scenery, as at the turn of the fiord a different view is disclosed. In the previous scenery the snow-covered mountains formed both foreground and background. Here they recede and form the rocky frame of a picture so sublime, so harmonious in composition, as to defy description. Most of what the Norwegians have presented to the world in their poetry, music, and art has had its germ here. Artists have tried to catch the coloring of this region; poets have celebrated it in song, and the music of its waterfalls has sounded the world over in the violin of Ole Bull.

The majesty and grandeur of the distant snow-capped mountains form a happy contrast to the foreground of the landscape, blend with it and intensify it. Green shores stretch far out into the fiord, and wind and bend in the most exquisite curves. Continuous orchards of pear, apple, and cherry trees on the banks of the fiord lend, especially in spring, a wonderful coloring to the scenery. Waving birch trees sing in the soft breezes, and bend down to the fiord to see their images in its clear waters. White brooks start out from the mountain-sides and wind among the meadows to reach the fiord. Pretty houses and large barns tell of the prosperity of the people, while white-painted churches lift their steeples among the orchards. Behind the meadows the pine forest rises dark and solemn against a background of rugged mountains. Most of these mountains are crowned with immense snow- and ice-fields, from which glaciers descend to the meadows without reaching the waters of the fiord. You hear the distant murmur of the waterfalls; swayed by sudden gusts of wind, they sprinkle the dark rock with a silvery spray; many disappear in mid-air changed into mist, condense again, re-form on projecting ledges, and once more evaporate before reaching the fiord. The murmur from these cascades never ceases; like the glaciers, they are fed by the snow-fields. You may travel all over Norway from north to south, from east to west, and the music of the waterfalls will follow you everywhere. It is interesting to note that the beauties of this particular region seem to be re-

flected in its people. The peasant living here has reached a higher development than anywhere else in Norway, both physically and mentally. His features are intelligent and refined, his carriage dignified and aristocratic. The women are beautiful, and among them you find the characteristic Scandinavian type better preserved, more unmixed, than in any other part of Norway.

The fiord forms in a way an organic part of the life of the peasant living on its banks. It takes the fish from the sea right to his door many miles inland, while it is the shining highway between the surrounding districts.

On the little promontory stands the white church, and the chiming of its bells can be heard far among the mountains. As an infant, the peasant was taken in a boat over to this church to be christened; as a boy, he was confirmed in the same place. Then came an important event in his life, when the bells chimed on his wedding-day. Such a scene has been commemorated by four of our greatest artists in color, poetry, and music. The picture is called the "Bridal Festival in Hardanger," and is painted by two of our greatest artists. Inspired by this wonderful painting, a Norwegian wrote a poem, to which music was added. A bridal party is seen gliding over the fiord, returning from church. In the stern of the bridal boat sits the fair bride, who, like a king's daughter of old, wears the golden crown that has been kept as an heirloom in the family for centuries. The bridegroom swings his hat in ecstasy; he looks at his bride, in whose blue eyes his whole future life seems reflected like a continual bridal feast. The strains from the fiddle resound over the waters, guns are fired, and the echo is ringing among the mountains.

Again, and for the last time, the peasant has to be carried across the fiord. The church bells that rang out so merrily on his wedding-day now chime with a heavy, doleful sound. In the little churchyard, on the banks of the fiord that he loved so well, he finds his last resting-place.

Among these surroundings the old Norse vikings used to live. When the king's son had reached a certain age, his father furnished him with a vessel and warriors, and from that time on he

was a sea-king, with the sea for his kingdom. In the swift-sailing dragon vessel he visited distant countries, conquering and forming new kingdoms wherever he went. His whole youth was spent to gain the riches and the fame without which he did not dare return to his own country. And then, at last, he came back, often with a king's daughter from a far-off country, and with marvelous tales of all the wonderful things that he had seen out in the wide world. But sometimes, even as an old man, the viking would be seized with a longing for the sea. When spring came and brought a message from the outside world through the mild sea breezes, the fiord would seem too narrow for the old sea-king; once more would he pick out his best men, and once more the heads of the dragon vessel would be turned toward foreign countries. Often the supremacy of the sovereign became too trying to the independent spirit of the viking; liberty and independence were the laws of his being, and if not to be had at home, he knew a realm where he could roam about wherever he chose—the wide, open sea. On such voyages Iceland and Greenland were colonized. As is well known, the vikings even pushed their way over to America, called by them Vinland. The small sailboat in which a few daring Norwegians succeeded in crossing the Atlantic, and which attracted so much attention at the World's Fair, was an exact model of the famous vessel that was unearthed some miles away from Christiania a few years ago.

What is known as Jotenheim, or "home of the giants," formed the wildest and highest part of the Scandinavian highlands. The mountains are situated near the west coast at the middle part of the plateau. Among their rugged peaks you will find nothing to remind you of the plateau or of the wide mountain-fields that are so characteristic of other parts of Norway. With its sharp peaks, glaciers, lakes, and narrow gorges, Jotenheim may be called the Norwegian Alps. In order to visit Jotenheim we shall follow one of the many valleys which, forming the landward continuation of the fiords, lead up to the mountains. The scenery of the valley is strikingly similar to that of the fiord. In the beginning the road is superb; it winds and twists in such a way as to leave a gentle grade and make a very easy ascent.

At the bottom of the valley a furious river rushes along; the roar of its many cascades reaches your ear, while the spray covers the pine forests like a veil. At one moment, as if repenting its own wildness, it stops suddenly to form a quiet little lake; and then, again tired of this passive life, it makes a sudden plunge and disappears from your sight. If you stop a moment and look down the valley, you will perhaps get a glimpse of the fiord, whose shining waters lie thousands of feet below you. As we pass on, the farms become fewer and the valley narrower, while of the river nothing is left but a noisy little brook that jumps from ledge to ledge. We have lost sight of the fiord long ago, and now we follow a narrow path that grows more and more indistinct.

The forest is very thin here, and the few pines and birch trees seem to struggle for existence; at last only shrubs and dwarf birches can be seen; still higher up the vegetation disappears almost entirely—only moss and heather still linger, while a few Alpine flowers peep from behind angular stones and nod to you in their brilliant colors.

After some hours of climbing we have at last reached the plateau. Your chest expands as you feel the keen blast sweeping against you. In front of you, at a very short distance, as it seems, a snow-field sparkles in the sunshine. Its surface plays in all the colors of the rainbow as the clouds drift over it; now it is transparent and white like crystals, now it changes into green and blue. From its icy embrace a stream bursts forth and starts on its long journey to the sea.

These glaciers, seemingly dead and cold, send the very life-blood through that vast body of rock called Norway. The little fiery river, child of the glacier, sets all the factories and mills going; on its swift currents the timber, cut during the winter, rushes along; and down in the large valleys, where the whistle of the engine has not been heard, it forms the highway among the districts.

At a short distance we see a few low cabins nestling among the mountains, and hear the lowing of cows; we have reached the pasture-house, or what is known in Norway as *saeter*. At

the barking of a dog, a young girl, dressed in the Norwegian peasant dress, comes out to bid us welcome. At her kind invitation, let us enter the house to rest a little. The interior is very simple and primitive, but neat and clean. On the shelves tubs of butter and cheese are placed in long rows; on the floor pine needles are strewn to give fragrance. From the hearth a blazing fire greets, and we soon feel at home among these kind, hospitable people.

The fresh mountain air has given us a ravenous appetite, and we notice with delight that a meal is being prepared for us. Let us see what they have to offer us: delicious trout fished from the ice-cold lake, cheese, cream, and fresh reindeer meat constitute the bill of fare in these pasture-houses.

Let us have a little chat with the saeter girls. It's a long time since they had visitors, and although they seemed somewhat bashful a moment ago, they are glad to have a gossip. Early in the summer the peasant girls take the cattle from the valley up to the high mountains, where they can roam about for miles and feast on the rich, juicy grass. The young girls stay here during the whole summer, many miles from the valley and the nearest peasant-house, tending the cattle and making cheese and butter. When Saturday comes around, everything is put in the best order in the staeter, and the girls put on their Sunday clothes, for on that day they may expect their lads from the valley. In the evening, when the setting sun makes the snow-fields and glaciers shine like gold, the saeter girl sits down on the lawn and looks down to the valley; she blows on the mountain-horn and listens; the strains from another horn are wafted up from the valley, telling that he is on his way.

Although living so far away from people, all alone among the mountains, I have never heard that a saeter girl was ever molested or insulted by anyone. They are brave girls, who are by no means afraid to use the gun when needed against the bear or the wolf. Of course, they feel lonesome sometimes, especially in the long light summer evenings; and on Sundays, when the chiming from the little church down in the valley is heard far and wide among the mountains, many a longing thought finds its way

down to the parish. But they are so busy from morning till night that there is hardly any time for longing. They have the cattle to tend, and they do take good care of them. Every cow has its pet name, to which it responds when called; some of these pet names will sound queer to your ears. Here is an example of the way they call the cattle in the evening: "Come, all little children! Come, all children mine! Come now, Brynhilda; come, Morning Glory, Moonlight, Evening Praise, Ever Clean, Star White, Shining Black, Princess, Queen, Snow White! Come, all my little children!"

All during the long, dark winter down in the valley the people long to go to the saeter, and I think the cattle do, too. In the winter the cattle get little food; but when summer comes, they eat as much as they like among the mountains. When the field-work is done down in the valley, the whole family goes to the saeter. The key of the house is left under the threshold, and for about a month you may go from house to house without finding people at home. When the family is going to start for the saeter, the few necessary things are put on the back of the little mountain-horse, and off it goes. What a joy for the children, who have looked forward to this trip during the whole winter! What a delightful day! The wild cherry is in blossom, the cuckoo is calling, the birds are singing; summer has come at last. The little Norwegian mountain-horse opens the procession with all the things. He finds his way all by himself; since he was a colt he has been accustomed to walk in the mountains. On the narrow path he finds just the right place to put his feet above the most dangerous precipices. Then comes the whole family, and then the goats and the sheep. The children are exceedingly happy. They want to have every bird and every flower they see; they throw stones in the brooks, and call and shout. At last they get a glimpse of the saeter far off on the opposite mountain slope; they see the cattle; they hear the horns of the saeter girls, and the children answer. The echo rings among the mountains and seems to say: "Welcome to the saeter!"

*[To be continued]*